

As I write this column on Friday, April 8, just a few hours away from a potential shutdown of the federal government, there is still no news of an 11th hour agreement. While I realize most of you will read this well after the Friday midnight deadline, when things will hopefully be more certain, I thought it important to comment on how we got so close to the brink of a government shutdown and what may lie ahead.

Keep in mind, the sole reason we are even discussing a possible shutdown is due to the fact that the Democrat leadership in the 111th Congress, that controlled both the House and Senate, failed to pass a budget or any annual appropriations bills to fund the government for 2011. This was the first time since 1974 – back when I was in the 8th grade – that Congress completely abdicated one of its most basic responsibilities.

Like many of you, I have grown weary of the constant drumbeat of "countdown to shutdown" on the national news. In an age of 24 hour-a-day news channels and a proliferation of tweets and blogs, we have become accustomed to breaking news sold to us with the frantic pitch of a 4th of July sale at the local car dealership.

While the commentators – acting like analysts at a major sporting event – spend much of their time speculating on whom to blame if a shutdown occurs – and who would benefit or be hurt politically – there is a very serious side to these negotiations that has been lost in all the distractions.

Remember this...what we do today will affect how our nation addresses a looming disaster that no amount of political rhetoric can avoid.

The truth is America is broke, not because we are taxed too little but because we've been spending too much.

Worse still, we have a gigantic amount of debt to repay – much of it owed to nations that do not have our long-term best interest in mind.

We are \$14 trillion in debt and unless we make significant and serious cuts to our spending moving forward, our nation faces a looming and catastrophic fiscal crisis. If the bill were to come due today, every U.S. household would have to fork out \$120,500 just to cover Uncle Sam's decades-long overspending.

Just to balance our federal budget for the current year – not touching the debt we already owe – would require our taxes to be increased by 60 percent. None of us could afford that, and Washington cannot continue spending with this reality staring us down.

Our leaders can no longer punt the responsibility to make difficult choices about the future role of the federal government; which services are essential and which are not. This is no different than the budget reality too many Americans are already facing with layoffs and declining wages. Shared sacrifice is going to be the new theme as we struggle to get our nation's financial house in order.

As the House, Senate and the president labor to reach a deal on spending cuts for the remainder of this year, the federal government is actually overspending to the tune of \$1.6 trillion. The harsh reality is the debate today – analogous to cutting \$28 out of a \$10,000 budget – is insignificant to the real work that lies ahead of us.

But there is a light flickering against this backdrop of darkness. It was recently revealed in the form of a courageous budget proposal offered by a young Republican congressman from Wisconsin, Paul Ryan.

Dubbed, "The Path to Prosperity", Rep. Ryan's federal spending blueprint for fiscal 2012 is more than a dry ledger of budgetary targets.

It is a roadmap out of the certain debt crisis we all face as a country. To be sure, it requires sacrifice from all of us. We cannot go forward without each shouldering a bit of the burden. However, unlike any budget proposal previously offered, the Ryan budget shows us that we can overcome our country's mountainous debt if we get serious about spending reforms.

It outlines a strategy to actually chop off \$4.4 trillion in federal deficits while reducing an impressive \$6.2 trillion in government spending over the next decade. It targets waste and goes after the tax code, calling for a simpler tax system.

While the likelihood of adopting the Ryan budget in its entirety is low, given the resistance to cut spending from the White House and the Senate, The Path to Prosperity is an excellent foundation for the long-overdue national conversation on federal spending reform that we must undertake this year if we are to protect the future solvency of our country.

If we are not able to reach an agreement, temporary government shutdowns will pale in comparison to the absolute disaster that awaits us. Let's get to work.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.